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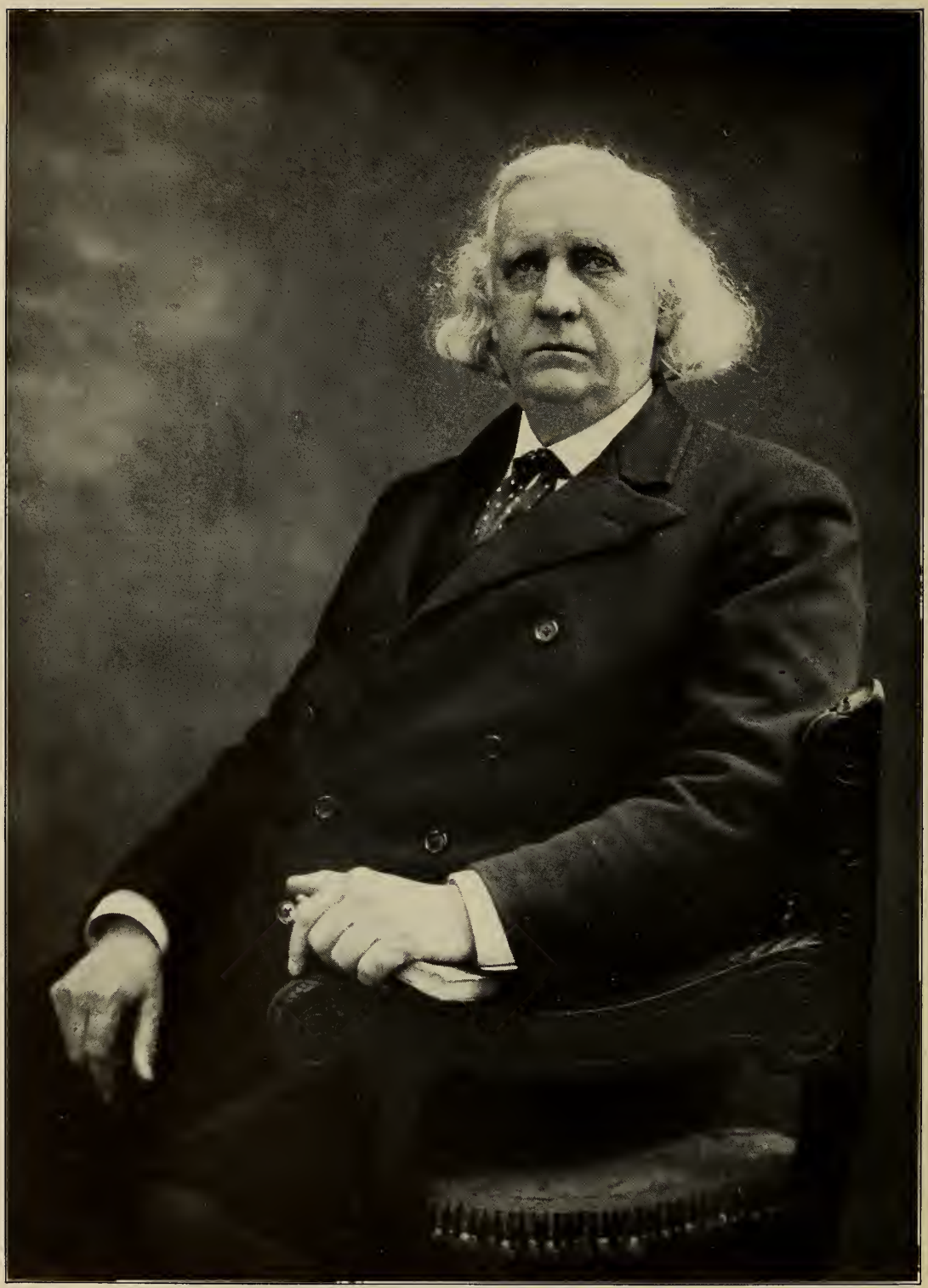
To

Miss Germaine Ranney

A BOGY MAN'S BALLAD



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A BOGY MAN'S BALLAD

FOR A MERRY MAID'S FESTIVAL:

The happy occasion being the eighteenth birthday of Miss Germaine Ranney.

I.

BETWEEN thy girlhood and thy womanhood,
On this dividing day,—
What shall I sing or say?
I know that others wish thee nought but good:
Yet *I*, perverse of will,
Dare wish thee something ill.

II.

Nay, start not back! I mean thee not a wrong!
But thou art slight and fair:
May God for thee prepare
A little hardship—just to make thee strong:
A little daily load
Upon an uphill road:

III.

A little pull against the wind and stream,
With oars that bend—not break:
A little wholesome ache
In bone and sinew—for I deem
That oft the body's pain
Is to the soul a gain.

IV.

I wish thee weariness—to earn thee rest:
I wish thee woe—not much—
Nor of a blanching touch—
Yet whoso hath no sorrow goes unblest!
So what is Youth? A sigh
At being born to die!

V.

And what is Life? A wonder that we live!—
For Death is hurrying near,
Aiming his lifted spear;
And Father Time—no limping fugitive—
Is ever on the run
To get his journey done.

VI.

So if, in shuddering at the years that flee,
Thou notice in their flight
Some sullied wing, not white,
That goes besmirched into Eternity,—
Shed thou a tear to-day
To wash the spot away.

VII.

I wish thee self-reproach! The sting is great,
But like the thorn, it shows
The vigour of the rose!
I wish thee hopes down-dashed! They indicate
That if they strike the ground,
They cannot but rebound!

VIII.

And though thou ask thyself in wonderment
Why Faith is dying out
And giving place to Doubt,
Yet be contented with thy discontent,—
For Heaven itself conceals
More stars than it reveals.

IX.

Shine if thou wilt in satin and brocade:
Yet maids of long ago
Were beautiful, we know,
Robed in the wool they spun; for, thus arrayed,
They queened it in the time
Ere Poverty was Crime!

X.

The streets are full of clatter. Sit thee down
And let thy chimney-nook,
Thy needle, and thy book
Be more to thee than all the maddening town!
—The toil of half an hour
Rebuilds Aladdin's tower!

XI.

The household fairies (ere from earth they fled)
Went to each maiden's room
And took to her a broom,
And in her slumber laid it by her bed!
—Her broom is still the sign
That housework is divine!

XII.

A hearthstone asks no impious sacrifice
Of Youthful joy and mirth!—
What would a home be worth
If purchasable only at the price
Of every pleasant thing
Which youth was meant to bring?

XIII.

I wish thee fun and frolic! Go with zest
To wreak thy heart's desire!
Yet first of all inquire
If what thy longing leads to .... is the best!
For be it understood,—
The Best alone is Good!

XIV.

Keep down thy vanity—keep up thy pride!
Yet both alike are part
Of every maiden's heart!
So let thy virgin-blush—too pure to hide—
Be like the altar-flame
That burns in Vesta's name.

XV.

I wish thee boldness never to let slip
A chance to show thy face
In any humble place
Where Mercy's tenderness of finger-tip
May stroke a burning brow,
As Charity knows how.

XVI.

And if thy knees bring visions to thy mind,
And if thy fancy broods
In high, immortal moods,—
Waste not the weird occasions!—(hard to find,
Yet easy to be lost!)
—Keep them at any cost!

XVII.

These are my wishes. And to round them up
Like a papyrus-roll,
All in a single scroll,
Or in a thimble, or an acorn-cup,—
The wish that now I add
Will hardly make thee glad:

XVIII.

My final and most churlish wish for thee,
And most against thy dreams,
(Yet kinder than it seems)
Is simply that thy heart awhile be free,—
Entangled not as yet
In any lover's net!

THEODORE TILTON.

PARIS, *February* 19, 1903.

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